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ABSTRACT

In March 1991, New Jersey's school finance reform law, The Quality Education Act, targeted 287 million dollars to 30 school districts with high proportions of at-risk students. This paper presents findings of a study that examined how 11 districts in New Jersey utilized state resources to meet the needs of their at-risk students. Five were classified as special-needs districts, two as moderately wealthy, and four as highly wealthy. Methodology involved analysis of census data and school district reports and a series of interviews conducted with key district leaders and school-based personnel. Findings indicate that great disparities existed between conditions in special-needs districts and other districts. Special-needs districts demonstrated a higher incidence of disadvantaging characteristics, such as poverty, less educated adults, minority groups, and student participation in free- and reduced-lunch programs. Staff who were asked to estimate the at-risk population tended to understate the differences between special-needs districts and other districts. In both special-needs and non-special-needs districts, the largest number of special programs were developed to meet academic needs. However, a high proportion of the programs in special-needs districts addressed students' social needs. Overall, the additional resources for special-needs districts appear to have created new program activity to meet the needs of at-risk students. However, the real question is whether these districts are in a position to offer the kind and intensity of programs that will fundamentally alter the educational prospects of their disadvantaged populations. Analysis of past initiatives indicates that efforts to date are necessary but unlikely to be sufficient. Five tables and 12 figures are included. (LMI)

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CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY ANALYSIS

NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT: THE QUALITY EDUCATION ACT AND AT-RISK STUDENTS

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Executive Summary

In March of 1991 an amended version of New Jersey's school finance reform law, the Quality Education Act, also known as QEA II, provided an additional 800 million dollars to New Jersey public schools. Of this amount, 287 million dollars were targeted for the thirty districts with high proportions of at-risk students.

Responding to interest in how these thirty districts, deemed special needs districts, were utilizing state resources to meet the needs of their at-risk students, this paper reports on a study conducted to examine the responses of eleven New Jersey school districts during the 1991-92 school year to students at-risk of educational failure. Five of these districts are special needs districts. Two districts are among those moderate wealth districts slated to continue to receive state foundation aid under the new finance legislation, and four others are among those high wealth districts scheduled to receive declining amounts of state aid for several years to assist with the transition to zero state aid.

The study considers four questions bearing on the use of district resources to meet the needs of at-risk students. First, it examines the existing conditions in the eleven districts, paying particular attention to the proportions of students likely to be at-risk of educational failure. Second, it considers the ways in which school personnel in different kinds of districts define and identify students as being at-risk of educational failure. Third, it reports extimates of the magnitude of the disadvantaged student population made by district personnel. Finally, it describes the nature of the programming developed in the eleven districts to assist at-risk students succeed in school.

To gather information on the impact of the Quality Education Act and the responses of school districts to the needs of their at-risk students, the study relied on analyses of available records, including census data on community characteristics and school district reports on enrollments and programs. The study also included interviews with key district leaders and with school-based personnel.

The data on community conditions and student characteristics show great disparities between the conditions confronting the special needs districts and those confronting the other districts in the sample. These disparities are well illustrated by a comparison of average classrooms in a special needs district and a transition district. In terms of family and community indicators, a typical classroom of 25 students in the special needs district would have 12 students from families below the poverty level, 17 students from single parent families, 12 students in families where the adults had less than a high school education, 9 students in families in which a language other than English is spoken, and 10 students living with adults who do not participate in the labor force. In contrast the typical classroom of 25 students in the transition district would have no students in families below the poverty level, 1 student from a single parent family, 2 students living with adults with less than a high school education, 4 students in families in which a language other than English is spoken, and no students living with adults who do not participate in the labor force.

The data on student characteristics show similar dramatic differences. In the typical classroom in the special needs district 19 students would be participating in the free and reduced lunch

program, 24 would be racial or ethnic minorities, 2 would be limited English proficient, 2 would be in special education, and only 11 would be likely to graduate from high school. In contrast, in the typical classrom in the transition district 1 student would be participating in the free and reduced lunch program, 4 would be racial and ethnic minorities, 1 would be limited English proficient, none would be in special education, and all 25 would be likely to complete high school.

School personnel in different types of districts were all able to describe procedures for defining and identifying at-risk students. However, the special needs districts confronted with larger numbers of students with academic deficiencies tend to apply a somewhat more restricted notion of at-risk than those districts with fewer at-risk students. Districts with fewer at-risk students were apparently more likely to extend the definition of at-risk status to include students who might not be considered at-risk in special needs districts. Interviews with district staff revealed a relative dimension to the definition of at-risk, as even students who perform at average levels might be considered at-risk in comparison with high achieving students in districts with highly competitive student bodies.

Estimates of the size of the at-risk population in the different types of districts varied in ways consistent with the systematic indicators drawn from census data and district reports. According to the estimates of professional staff members, the at-risk population in the special needs districts is nearly five times as great as that in foundation and transition aid districts. A similar comparison using census and school district data suggests that the at-risk populations are 9 times greater in the special needs districts than in the foundation and transition aid districts. Thus, differences in staff estimates of the at-risk population tend to understate the true nature of the differences.

The analysis of district programs to address the needs of at-risk students revealed that both special needs and other districts offered special programs to meet the academic and social needs of students. Not suprisingly, the five special needs districts offered greater numbers of programs (76) than the foundation and transition aid districts (29). Of the 76 programs offered in the special needs districts, 30 were begun during the 1991-92 school year, the first year in which QEA funds went to local school districts. In contrast, only 1 of the 29 programs for at-risk students in the non-special needs districts was initiated during the 1991-92 school year.

In both special needs districts and non-special needs districts the largest number of special programs for at-risk students were developed to address academic needs. However, in special needs districts, a greater proportion of the programs for at-risk students were designed to address social needs. Over half of the new program initiatives in the special needs districts in 1991-92 were designed to address the social needs of students. In light of the substantial differences in community, family, and student conditions, the special needs districts appear to be responding to the substantially greater social needs of their students.

Overall, the additional resources made available to the special needs districts appear to have led to substantial new programmatic activity to address the needs of their at-risk students. The new activity has been directed for the most part to addressing the academic and social needs of students that are internal to the school and its program. However, the real question that remains is whether even with the addition of the new efforts of the special needs districts, they are in a position to offer the kind and intensity of programs that will fundamentally alter the educational prospects of their severely disadvantaged populations with substantial external needs. Analyses of similar programmatic initiatives undertaken over the past twenty years suggest that the kinds of efforts initiated during 1991-92 in the special needs districts are likely to result in positive but quite modest effects on their severely disadvantaged students. In other words, the efforts to date are necessary but unlikely to be sufficient.

Necessary But Not Sufficient
The Quality Education Act and At-Risk Students

In June of 1990 the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in the Abbott v. Burke case by finding the existing state system for funding public education unconstitutional in the case of poorer urban districts. The Court found that in such districts in New Jersey the education delivered to the students was neither thorough nor efficient. In Abbott the New Jersey Supreme Court went beyond its earlier definition of the constitutionally required "thorough and efficient education" as one in which the educational opportunity needed in modern society to equip a child for his or her role as a citizen and competitor in the labor market. The Abbott decision argued that a thorough and efficient education is more than just teaching the skills needed to compete in the labor market, it also entails the ability to participate in other realms of life as well. The Court concluded that the disparity in educational programs between poorer urban districts and affluent suburban districts meant that students in the urban districts could not possibly enter the job market or society as peers of their counterparts from suburban school districts (Goertz, 1992a). After concluding that money makes a difference in the quality of education offered to students and that students in poorer urban districts required more resources than students in wealthier communities, the Court ordered the legislature to equalize spending for regular education programs between poorer urban districts and property-rich districts in the state and to provide additional funds to address the special educational needs of the disadvantaged students in the urban districts (Goertz, 1992a).

The signing of the Quality Education Act of 1990 by New Jersey Governor James Florio on July 3, 1990 opened the door to a range of new possibilities for the education of those at-risk youth concentrated in thirty poorer urban districts in the state.[1] This legislation

increased overall state aid to education by 1.15 billion dollars and targeted much of this aid to the special needs districts. The original QEA legislation, and the process of educational planning associated with it, promised more resources for the education of at-risk youth.

If the original Quality Education Act opened the door to new possibilities in educating at-risk students, the amendments to the act that were passed in March of 1991 closed the door somewhat again. An amended version of the act, known as QEA II, reduced the increase in state aid to education from 1.15 billion to 800 million dollars and targeted 287 million of these dollars to the special needs districts (See Goertz, 1992a, for a complete account.). Nevertheless, the QEA II legislation still made additional resources available to the thirty special needs districts and threatened to place additional fiscal constraints on other districts throughout the state (Firestone, Goertz, Nagle, & Smelkinson, 1993).

This paper examines the impact of the Quality Education Act on those students who were the focus of both the New Jersey State Supreme Court's Abbott v. Burke decision and of the Quality Education Act itself, at-risk students. Drawing on data collected in a sample of special needs districts and other districts throughout the state, the analysis considers four major questions.

First, we consider the extent to which students are likely to be at-risk of educational failure in districts identified for different kinds of treatment by the Quality Education Act. The legislation divides New Jersey's school districts into three major types: special needs districts designated to receive substantial new state support, foundation districts designated to continue to receive foundation support from the state government, and transition districts designated to receive a declining amount of funding over a short period of time to assist them in making the transition to the eventual loss of basic support from the state government. The special needs districts and the transition aid districts were identified in the Abbott ruling as the

two groups across which resources should be equalized; the foundation aid districts are those districts which tend to fall somewhere between the two extremes of the other sets of districts. To understand the impact of the Quality Education Act on at-risk students, it is important to understand the representation of such students in these three kinds of districts. Such an understanding allows us both to appreciate the magnitude of the disparities in communities and student populations and the nature of the educational programs developed in response to community and student needs.

Second, we examine the ways in which school personnel in both poorer and wealthier districts define and identify students as being at-risk for educational failure. Natriello, McDill, and Pallas (1990) have noted at least four distinctly different approaches to defining disadvantaged or at-risk students:

1) *the culturally deprived or socially disadvantaged*, i.e., those who suffer from inadequate family situations, personal deficiencies such as inferior auditory or visual discrimination, or social group characteristics such as low socioeconomic status and membership in a minority group that has experienced social and economic discrimination (Havighurst, 1965; Bernstein, 1960; Passow and Elliott, 1967),

2) *the educationally deprived*, i.e., those who, for social, political, or cultural reasons, have limited or restricted access to the "normal" facilities of the school (Passow, 1970),

3) *the at-risk*, i.e., those who because of a combination of individual and environmental characteristics, face a differential susceptibility in which the environment becomes unnegotiable (McCann and Austin, 1988; Beyer and Smey-Richman, 1988; Grannis, 1979),

4) *the entire youth population*, i.e., those who are blocked in any way from realizing their full potential (Fantini and Weinstein, 1968; Ulhenberg and Eggebeen, 1986; Coleman and Hoffer, 1987).

These different approaches to defining students as disadvantaged or at-risk of educational failure lead both to different estimates of the size of the disadvantaged student population in a district or other region and to different approaches to the development of programs to meet the needs of these students. For example, defining the at-risk population as those with familial or cultural deficits results in substantially smaller estimates of the at-risk population than those derived from defining virtually all adolescents as at-risk of not realizing their full human potential. Similarly, defining the at-risk student population as potentially all adolescents may lead to a rethinking of how our major social institutions serve the needs of young people, while defining the at-risk population as those suffering from inadequate schools may lead to efforts to improve the specific schools in question. Given the great disparities in community and student conditions and in the resources for schooling, we can anticipate differences across districts in the way students are identified as being at-risk of educational failure.

The estimates of the extent of the at-risk population and the programs developed to address the needs of that population are the other two major questions addressed in the current analysis. The third major question of concern is the extent of the at-risk population as defined by personnel in different school districts. Our examination of the estimates of the at-risk student population will consider both the size of the at-risk population as perceived by school personnel in particular schools and districts, and the size of the population when assessed by more standard methods.

The fourth major question to be addressed is the nature of the programming that has been developed in response to the needs of at-risk students. Programs for at-risk students can be considered along a number of dimensions. In the present analysis we consider such programs in terms of two major dimensions identified in earlier investigations of such programs (Natriello, McDill & Pallas, 1990; Montgomery, Rossi, Legters, McDill, McPartland, & Stringfield, 1993). The first dimension draws attention to whether the program is addressing the academic needs of students or the social and/or emotional needs of students. The second dimension highlights the locus of the problems faced by such students by specifying it as either internal to the school or in the wider external environment in which students are living.

Using these two dimensions results in the four category typology depicted in Table 1.

Table 1
Typology of Programs for Addressing the Needs of At-Risk Students

	Internal	External
Academic	Academic Internal	Academic External
	Tutoring	*I Have a Dream*
Social	Social Internal	Social External
	House Plan	*Health Clinic*

Academic internal needs are those which pertain to difficulties that students might be experiencing with the regular school program. These needs can be addressed through programs that are designed to help students achieve academic success in school. Such programs may provide additional instruction for students or adapt existing instruction to match student skill levels more closely. Tutoring programs which expose students to one-on-one instruction either with peers or with aides or teachers are examples of efforts to address such academic needs of at-risk students.

Social internal needs are those which relate to the immediate social environment of the school. At-risk students sometimes experience a lack of connection to the school as an institution and to the teachers and students in the school. This may be particularly true when students enter large schools in which individual students can be overlooked. Programs that seek to strengthen the connection of students to others in the school attempt to reduce the alienation experienced by at-risk students. The restructuring of large schools into multiple

houses in which small groups of teachers and students work together is one approach to strengthening the social connection of students to the school.

Academic external needs are those which relate to the perceived value of student academic performance in the wider environment beyond the school. At-risk students often perceive little connection between their present academic performance and valued rewards outside the school in the present or the future. When students are not exposed to individuals in the family or the community who have succeeded in life as a result of academic achievement in school, they fail to see school performance as important and so are less motivated to devote effort to school work. Programs, such as the *I Have a Dream Program*, which promise college entry and financial support to students who remain in school and work hard, seek to establish in students' minds the connection between present efforts at school and future rewards.

Social external needs are those which relate to the social conditions in the families and the communities in which students reside that make it more difficult for them to concentrate their efforts on school work. Families that are less stable, poor families, single parent families, and families with health problems or substance abuse problems often place additional burdens on students. Similarly, communities that are unstable or plagued by crime and unemployment often cannot create conditions supportive of students who seek to remain in school. Programs such as school-based health clinics seek to provide the kind of support for student health and well-being that cannot be provided by families and communities without adequate resources.

The efforts of schools and school districts to respond to the needs of at-risk students are often varied and complex. Programs typically combine several or more kinds of services.

Nevertheless, it is possible to apply the typology detailed here to develop an overall assessment of the nature of district responses to the problems of at-risk students.

By considering both the underlying community and student conditions in different types of school districts and the approaches taken toward the definition and identification of at-risk youth in these districts, we can better understand the ways in which school district personnel assess the at-risk populations in their districts and develop programs to meet their needs. Moreover, we can analyze more fully the investments made in new educational resources in the first year of the Quality Education Act.

Method

The major strategy used to examine the impact of the Quality Education Act was a set of case studies in eleven New Jersey school districts. These case studies examined changes in the district budgets and programs during the 1991-92 school year.

Sample

Eleven districts were selected as the subjects of illustrative case studies of the impact of the Quality Education Act on districts that differ in financial situation, size, and geographic location within the state. Five districts were special needs districts, two were foundation aid districts, and four were transition aid districts. In the present analyses the special needs districts are identified as SN1 through SN5. The foundation aid and transition aid districts are designated as a single group and identified as FT1 through FT6. The eleven districts ranged in size from 2,276 students to 29,066 students in the Fall of 1991 (Bureau of Government Research, 1991). They were located in the north, central, and southern regions of the state. Although the present analysis focuses on the impact of the Quality Education Act on at-risk

students who constitute a larger proportion of enrollments in the special needs districts, at-risk students were identified by staff in all eleven districts.

To gather information on the impact of the Quality Education Act on these eleven districts in general, and on their at-risk students in particular, the case study method employed multiple techniques.

Archival records were collected from each district. These records included standard annual reports of enrollments in regular and special programs, applications for state aid, district budgets for the 1989-90, 1990-91, and 1991-92 fiscal years, district salary guides, district curriculum guides, and for special needs districts the educational improvement plans required by the state under the QEA legislation.

District level interviews were conducted in the Fall of 1991 and the Spring of 1992. During the fall interviews were conducted with the superintendent, the business administrator, the assistant superintendent for curriculum, directors of special education, bilingual/ESL, Chapter I/State Basic Skills, the district testing coordinator, a representative of the teachers' union, a representative of the administrators' union, a member of the board of education, a representative of the local municipal governing body, and a member of the local press. These interviews covered a range of topics, including the budget and budget planning, the district program and program planning, the organization and operation of special programs, the monitoring and review process for special needs districts, relations with the state, and relations with the local community.

Each of these interviews contained the following series of questions pertaining to at-risk students in the district:

A. Now let's turn our attention to the issue of children at-risk. Some people describe at-risk children in terms of special programs like Chapter 1 or Bilingual education. Some people use a broader definition. How do you define at-risk children in this district?

B. Using that definition, about what percent of the children in the district would you say are at-risk?

C. Last year, as best you can tell, what percent of the children who were at-risk were receiving services?

D. As a result of QEA, would you say more at-risk children or fewer are receiving services? How big is the difference?

E. In what ways are these at-risk children being served better as a result of QEA?

F. In what ways are they being served worse?

In addition to these questions, there were questions on special programs serving students at-risk such as Chapter I/State Basic Skills, Bilingual/ESL, special education, and dropout prevention.

During the Spring of 1992 interviews were conducted again with the superintendent, the business administrator, and the assistant superintendent for curriculum.

School level interviews were conducted in the Spring of 1992 in a sample of schools. In eight of the districts one senior high school, one middle school or junior high school, and two elementary schools were included in the sample. In the largest district with a K-8, 9-12 grade configuration, two senior high schools and six K-8 elementary schools were included in the sample. In the second largest district one high school, one middle school, and six elementary schools were included in the sample. In another district which housed all kindergarten classes in one building separate from the elementary schools, this early childhood center was included along with two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

At each school interviews were conducted with the principal, the head of guidance, and directors of any special programs. Once again, these interviews covered a broad range of topics including the budget for the school, the general program of the school and program planning, special programs, instructional strategies employed in the school, and changes in the school over the past year. In schools in special needs districts, questions were also asked about the state-mandated educational improvement plan for the district and its impact on the school. Each interview contained the following questions pertaining to at-risk students in the school:

A. What percent of the children in this school would you say are at-risk? In what sense are they at-risk?

B. In what ways are the needs of these at-risk children being well met?

C. In what ways are they being poorly met?

Additional questions pertaining to at-risk students concerned the special programs available in the school to meet their needs.

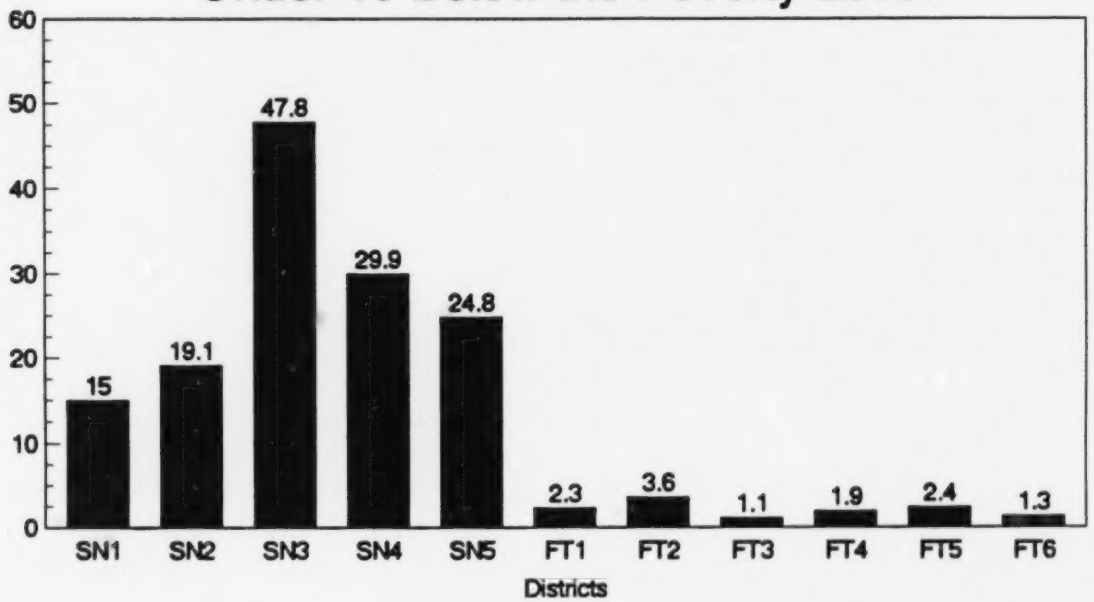
Results

The Community and Family Contexts

Figures 1 through 7 provide summaries of socio-demographic characteristics associated with at-risk status for the eleven communities in which the district case studies were conducted. For each district data on seven socio-demographic indicators drawn from the 1990 U.S. Census are displayed.[2] These indicators include the percentage of families with children under 18 below the poverty level, the percentage of single parent households in the community, the percentage of the adult population with less than a high school education, the percentages of the population in various racial groups, the percentage of the population of Hispanic origin, the percentage of persons 5 to 17 years old living in a home in which a language other than English is spoken, and the percentage of children living in households in which no parent participates in the labor force. These indicators have been used in previous analyses (Natriello, McDill & Pallas, 1990; Natriello, 1993) to describe the degree to which the broader community in which schools are located exposes students to greater than normal risk of not completing high school.

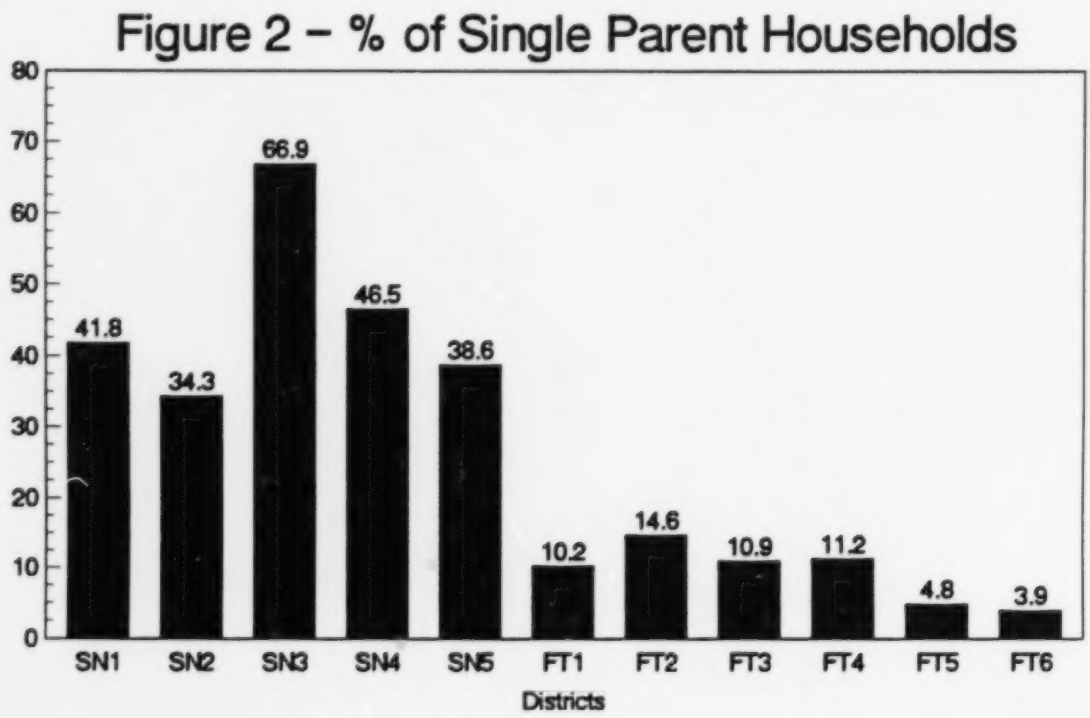
Figure 1 shows the percentages of families with children under 18 below the poverty level in each of the eleven communities.

Figure 1 – % of Families With Children Under 18 Below the Poverty Level



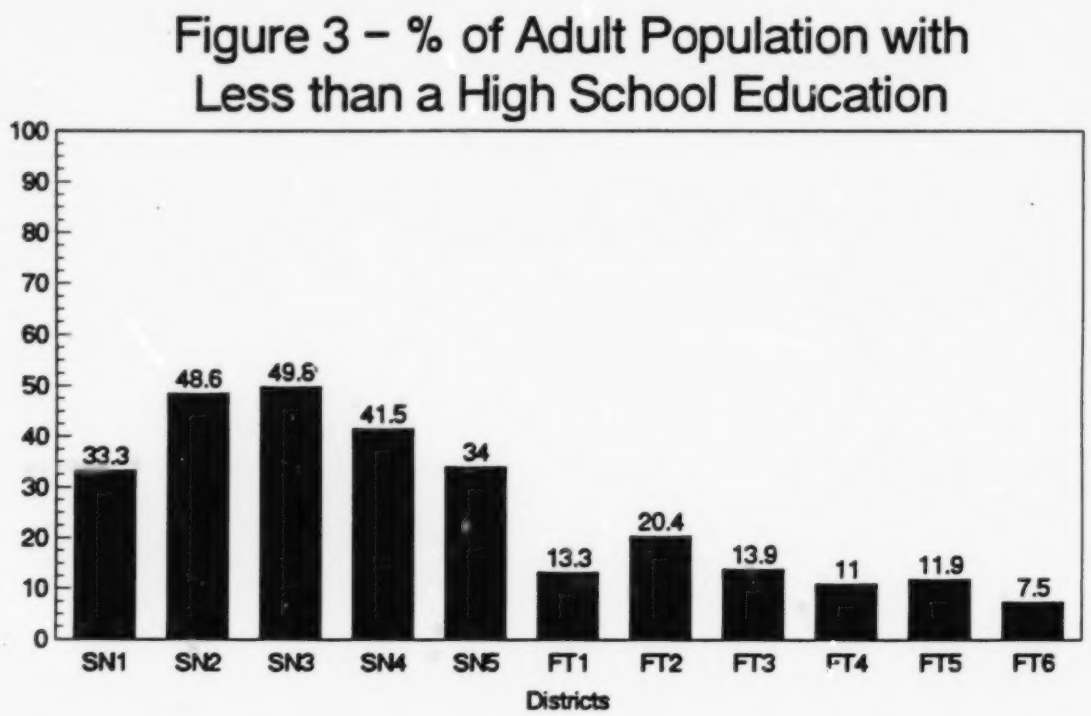
In terms of the percentage of families with children under 18 below the poverty level, the five special needs communities range from 15% (SN1) to 47.8% (SN3) of families in this condition. The proportion of families with children under 18 below the poverty level range from 1.1% to 3.6% in the foundation and transition aid communities. All are substantially lower than the community with the lowest proportion of families below the poverty level among the special needs communities, SN1 with 15%.

Figure 2 presents data on the composition of families in these eleven communities.



The family composition indicator reveals that the five special needs communities range from 34.3% (SN2) single parent households to 66.9% (SN3) single parent households. The foundation and transition aid districts range from 3.9% single parent households in FT6 to 14.6% single parent households in FT2. All are substantially lower than the lowest special needs district, SN2 with 34.3% single parent households.

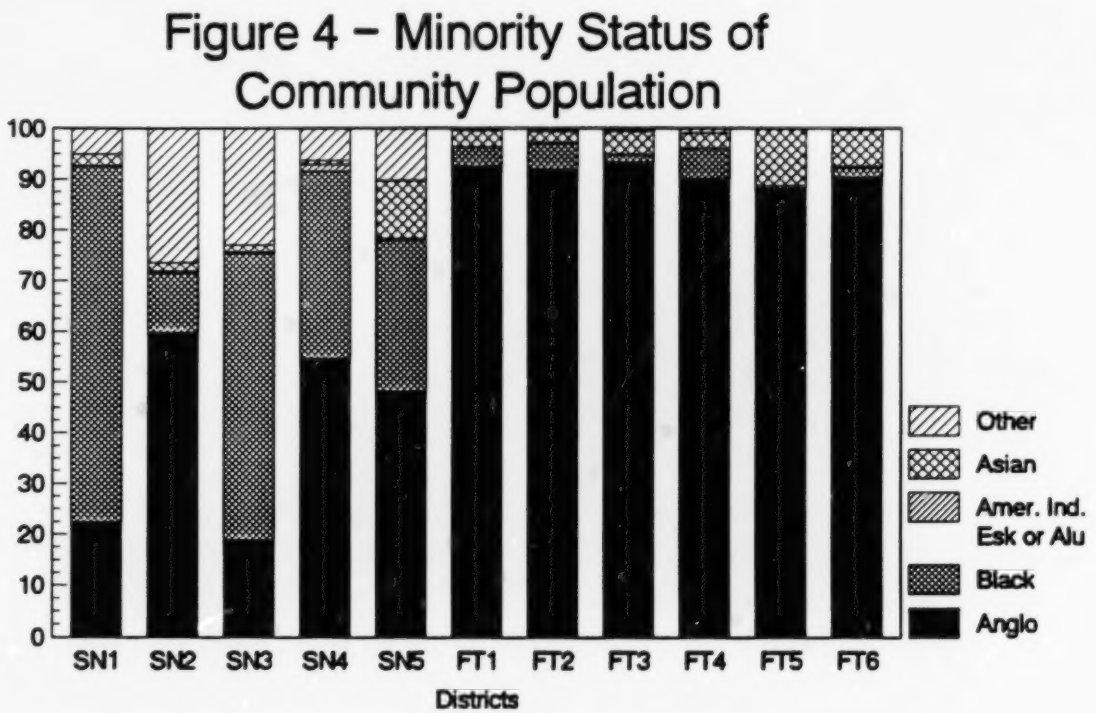
In each of the special needs communities at least one-third of the adult population has not completed high school. Figure 3 reveals a range moving from 33.3% in SN1 to 49.8% in SN3.



The gap between the special needs districts and the foundation and transition aid districts is not as large in the case of the proportion of adults with less than a high school education. Among the foundation and transition aid districts the range is from 7.5% to

20.4%; in the lowest special needs district (SN3) 33.3% of the adults have less than a high school education.

The five special needs communities exhibit considerable variation in the racial/ethnic composition of the population as shown in Figure 4.

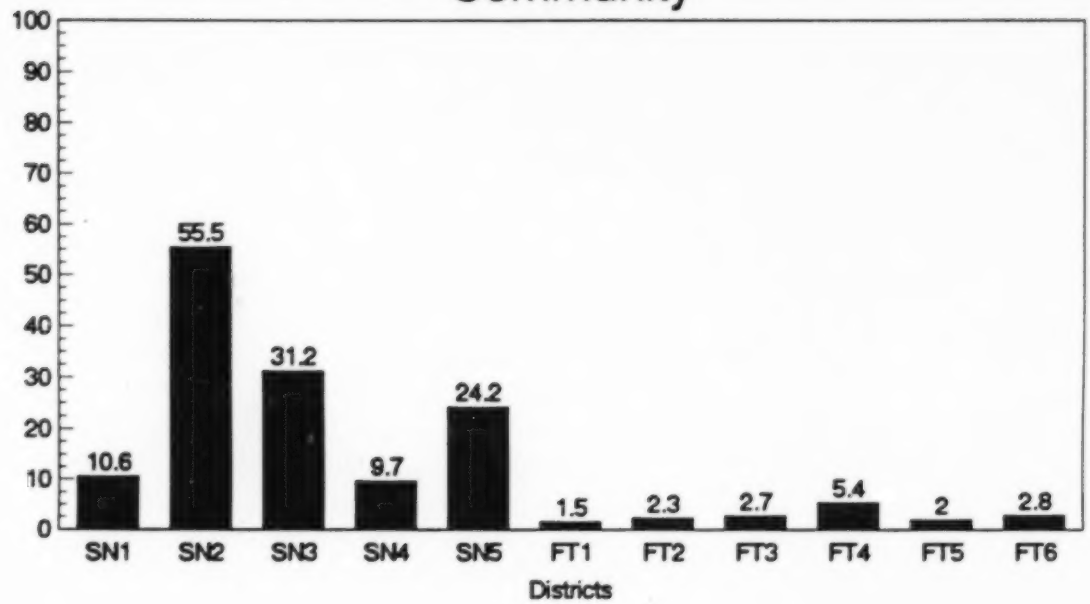


Among the special needs communities, the White population ranges from 19.0% in SN3 to 59.8% in SN2; the Black population ranges from 11.8% in SN2 to 70.1% in SN1.

There are relatively minor racial/ethnic differences among the foundation and transition aid communities. The White population ranges from 88.2% to 93.3% of the total population in these communities compared to 59.8% in SN2, the special needs community with the highest proportion of Whites. The Black population in the foundation and transition aid communities ranges from 0.5% to 5.8% compared to 11.8% in SN2, the special needs community with the lowest proportion of Black residents.

Figure 5 shows the percentage of persons of Hispanic origin in the eleven communities.

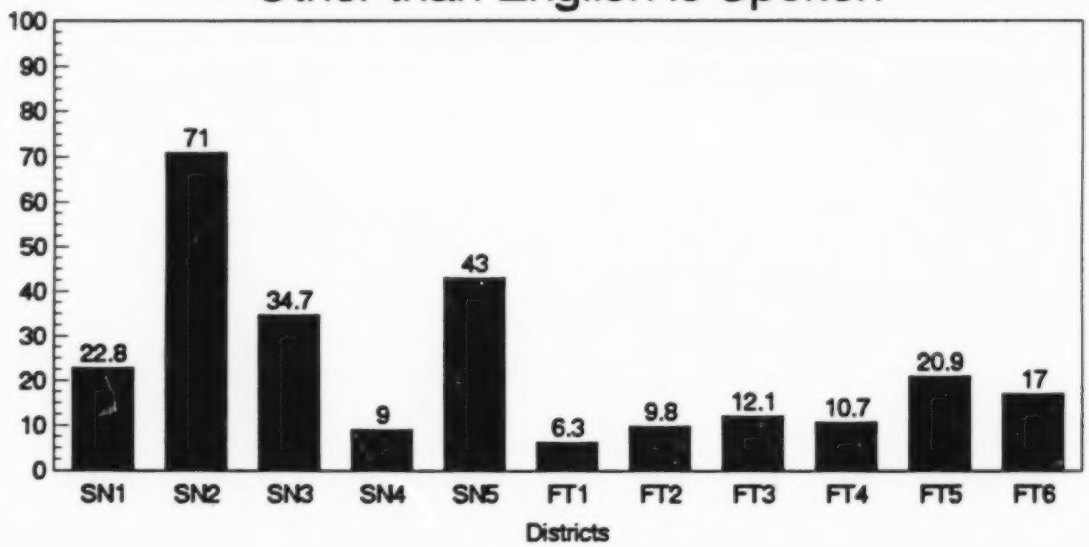
Figure 5 – % Hispanic Origin in Community



Among special needs districts, the Hispanic population ranges from 9.7% in SN4 to 55.5% in SN2. Hispanics are 1.5% to 5.4% of the population in the foundation and transition aid communities compared to 9.7% of the population in SN4, the special needs community with the lowest proportion of Hispanic residents.

There are large differences among the five special needs districts in terms of the proportions of their populations living in a home in which a language other than English is spoken, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 – % of Persons 5–17 Years Old Living in a Home in Which a Language Other than English is Spoken



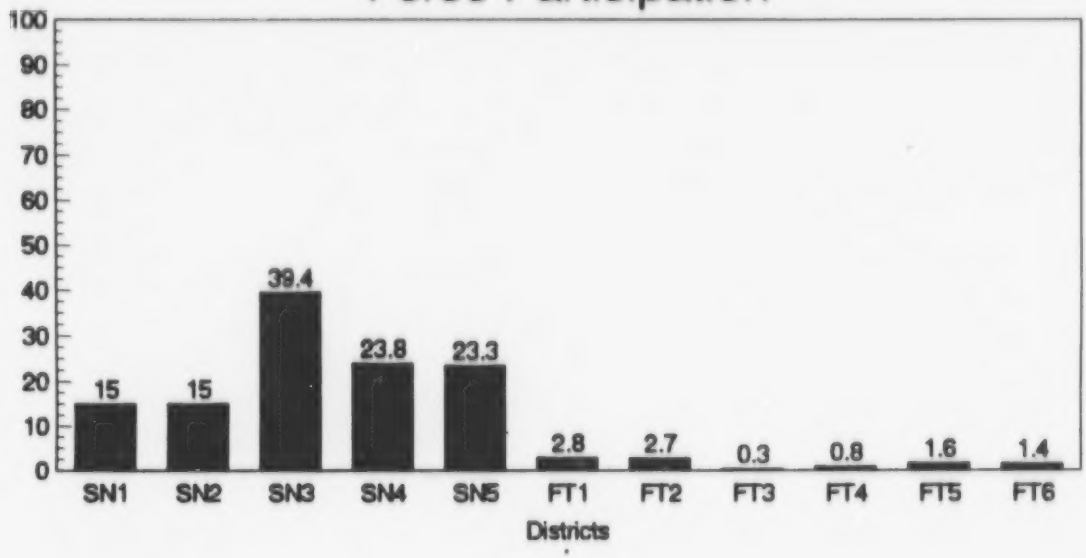
In SN4 only 9% of the population is living in such situations, while in SN2 71% of the population is living in a home in which a language other than English is spoken.

The proportion of persons between 5 and 17 years old living in a home in which a language other than English is spoken varies among the six foundation and transition

communities from 6.3% in FT1 to 20.9% in FT5. FT5 and FT6, the two communities with the highest proportions of persons in homes in which a language other than English is spoken, are also the two communities with the highest proportions of Asian or Pacific Islanders among residents. Although the special needs communities generally have higher proportions of residents living in homes in which a language other than English is spoken, one special needs community, SN4 has a smaller proportion of residents in such homes (9%) than all but one of the foundation and transition aid districts.

As shown in Figure 7, parent labor force participation also varies across the five special needs districts with 15% of the children in SN1 and SN2 living in situations in which no parent is participating in the labor force, and 39.4% of the children in SN3 living in such situations.

Figure 7 – % of Persons Under 18 Living With Parent(s) With No Labor Force Participation



The proportions of children living with parents, neither of whom participates in the labor force, range from 0.3% to 2.8% among the foundation and transition aid communities. The lowest special needs districts (SN1 and SN2) have 15% of children living with parents who do not participate in the labor force.

The community profiles that emerge from these indicators reveal quite distinct patterns for some communities. SN3 is clearly the poorest of the five special needs communities with

by far the largest proportion of families with children under 18 below the poverty level, by far the largest proportion of single parent families, the largest proportion of the adult population with less than a high school education, and the largest proportion of children living with parents with no labor force participation. This community also has the smallest proportion of white residents.

SN1, on the other hand, is the least poor of the five special needs districts with the smallest proportion of families with children under 18 below the poverty level, the lowest proportion of adults with less than a high school education, and the lowest (with SN2) proportion of children living with parents with no labor force participation. SN1 also has the highest proportion of Black residents of the five districts.

SN2 has only a slightly greater poverty rate than SN1 (19.1% to 15.0%) and has an equal proportion of children living with parents with no labor force participation. However, whereas SN1 has the highest proportion of Black residents of the five districts, SN2 has the highest proportion of Hispanic residents and the lowest proportion of Black residents of the five special needs districts. SN2 also has the highest proportion of persons 5-17 living in a home in which a language other than English is spoken and the lowest proportion of single parent households among the five communities.

SN4 and SN5 fall toward the middle of the range of the five special needs districts on the poverty indicators, proportion of families with children under 18 below the poverty level and proportion of children living with parents with no labor force participation. SN4 has the smallest proportion of Hispanic residents among the five districts, while SN5 has the third highest proportion of Hispanic residents and the second highest proportion of persons 5-17 living in homes in which a language other than English is spoken.

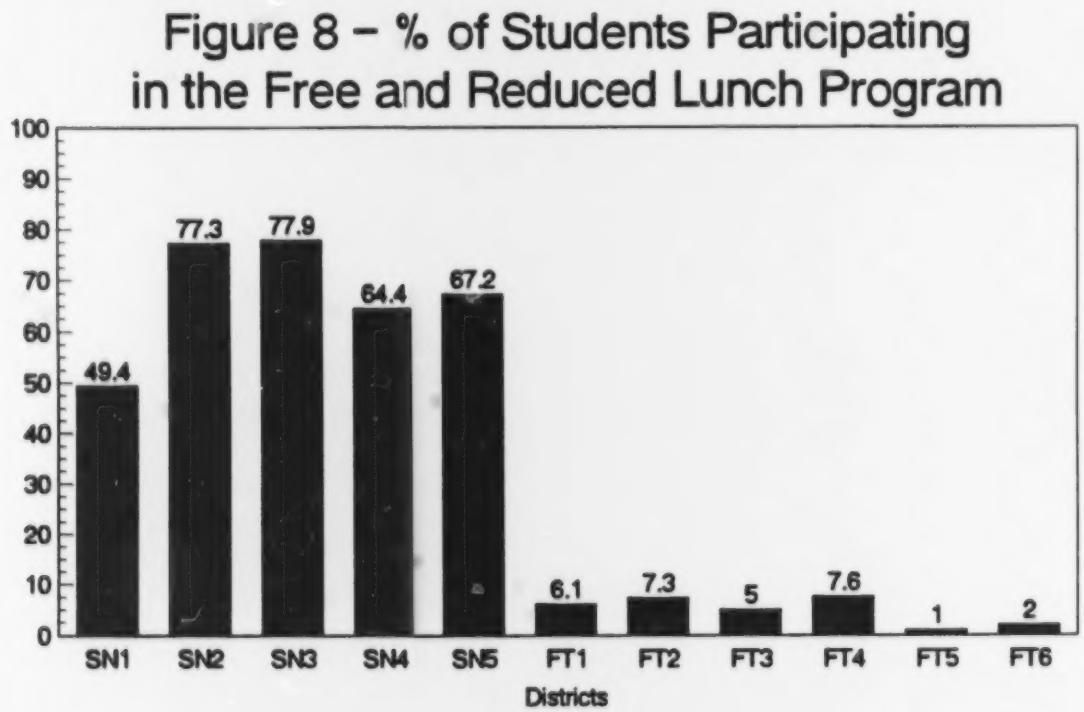
Although the foundation and transition aid communities have substantially smaller proportions of residents with sociodemographic characteristics associated with greater risk of school failure than the special needs communities, there are differences among these six communities worth noting. FT2 has the highest proportion of families below the poverty level (3.6%), the highest proportion of single parent families (14.6%), and the highest proportion of adults with less than a high school education (20.4%). In contrast, FT6 has the second lowest proportion of families below the poverty level (1.3%), the lowest proportion of single parent families (3.9%), and the lowest proportion of adults with less than a high school education (7.5%). FT5 has the highest proportion of children living in homes in which a language other than English is spoken and the highest proportion of Asian or Pacific Islander residents.

Even considering the differences within these two groups of districts, special needs and non-special needs, it is clear that there are wide disparities between the two groups of districts in these indicators of risk of educational failure. These disparities in favor of the foundation and transition aid districts suggest that students in the special needs districts are likely to be at much greater risk of educational failure than their counterparts in the foundation and transition aid districts. The increased risk of educational failure stemming from disadvantaging family and community characteristics carry serious implications for the development of educational programs to meet student needs in the special needs districts.

Student Characteristics

Figures 8 through 12 present data on at-risk indicators associated with the students in the eleven districts in the study. The indicators are the percentage of students participating in the free and reduced lunch program, the percentages of students in various racial/ethnic groups, the percentage of students with limited English proficiency, the percentage of students in special education, and the high school completion rate (an indicator of the dropout rate).

Figure 8 portrays the percentages of students participating in the free and reduced lunch program in the eleven districts.

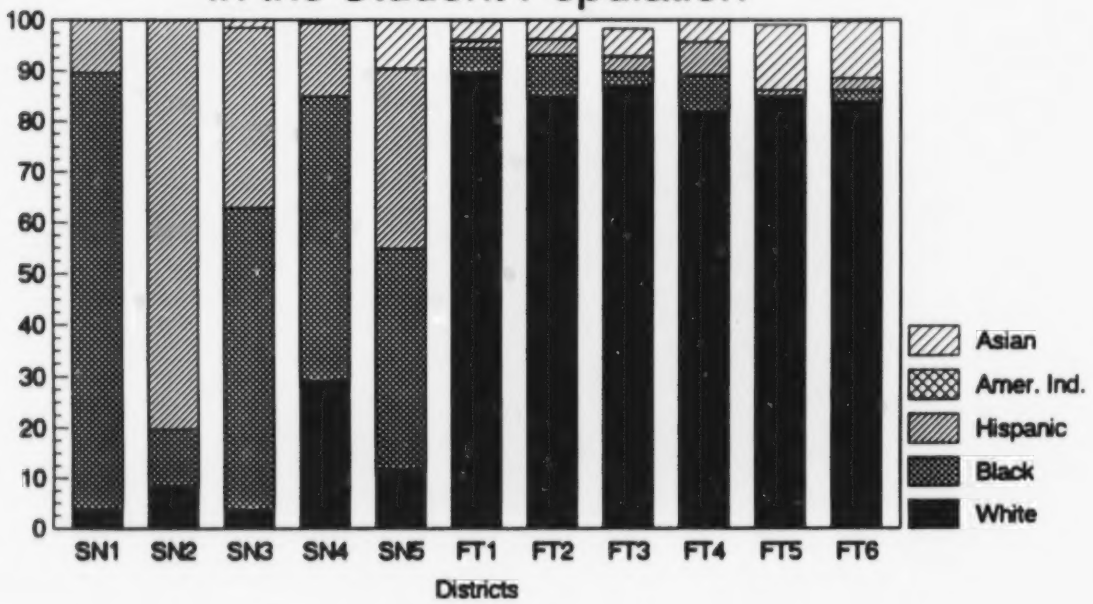


Among the special needs districts, the proportion of students participating in the free and reduced lunch program ranges from 49.9 in SN1 to 77.9% in SN3. Although there is considerable variation, all five districts have large numbers of students participating in the program.

As in the case of the community indicators, the student at-risk indicators reveal that the differences among the special needs districts are overshadowed by the differences between special needs districts and foundation and transition aid districts. The proportion of students participating in the free and reduced lunch program in the foundation and transition aid districts range from 1% in FT5 to 7.3% in FT2. This is substantially lower than the 49.9% of students participating in the program in SN1, the special needs district with the smallest proportion of students participating in the program.

Figure 9 indicates the distribution of students across various racial and ethnic groups in the eleven districts.

Figure 9 – % Minority Status in the Student Population

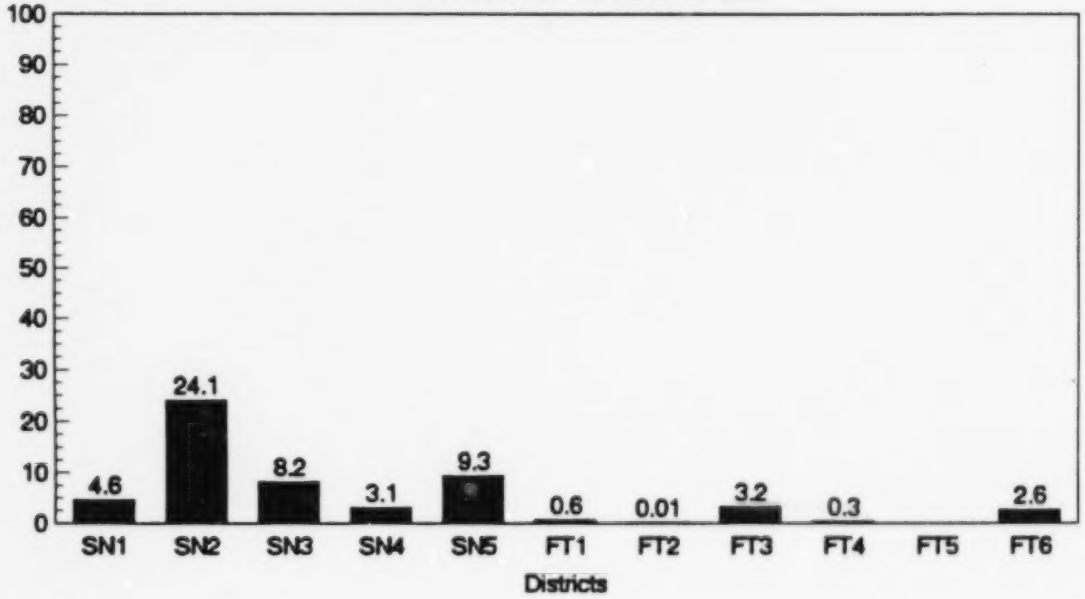


There is great variation in the proportions of students in various racial/ethnic groups in the special needs districts. The proportion of White Non-Hispanic students ranges from 3.7% in SN1 to 29.2% in SN4. The proportion of Black Non-Hispanic students ranges from 11.1% in SN2 to 85.8% in SN1. The proportion of Hispanic students ranges from 11.0% in SN1 to 80.3% in SN2. Four of the districts have fewer than 1.5% Asian or Pacific Islander students; SN5 has 9.6% Asian or Pacific Islander students.[3]

In a pattern that parallels that found for the community at-large, the racial/ethnic composition of enrolled students among the foundation and transition aid districts is dramatically different. The proportion of non-minority students in the six districts ranges from 80.4% in FT4 to 89.7% in FT1; all special needs districts have dramatically smaller proportions of non-minority students.

Figure 10 shows the percentage of limited English proficient students in the eleven districts.

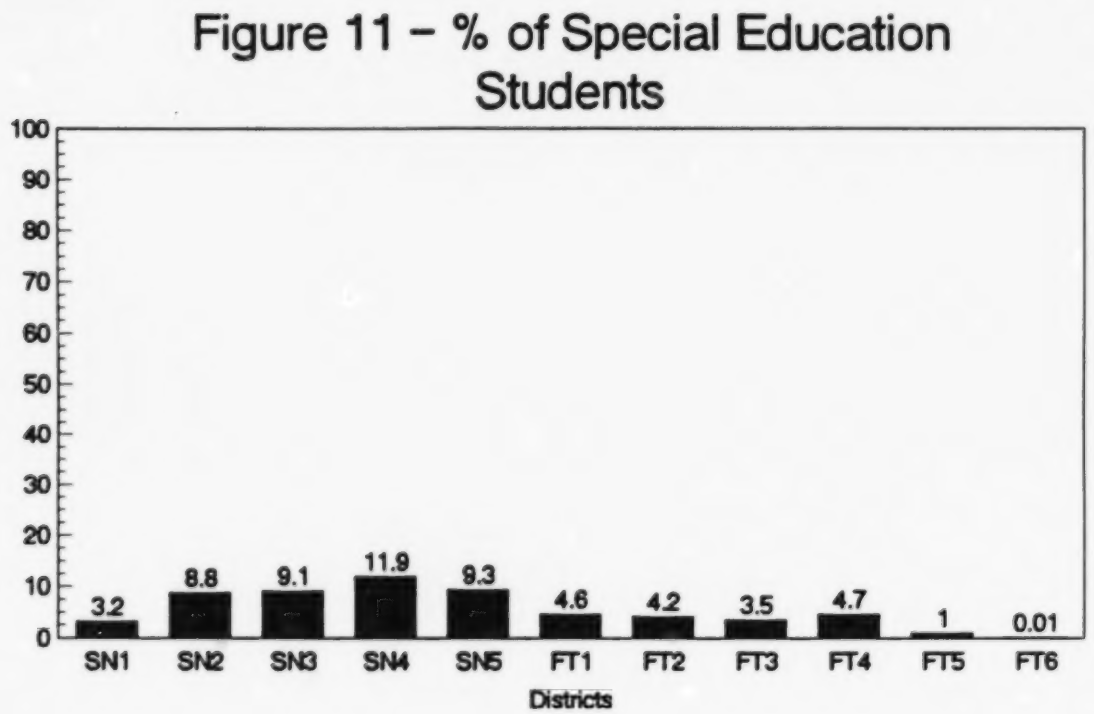
Figure 10 – % of Limited English Proficient Students



Among the special needs districts, two districts have small proportions of limited English proficient students, SN4 with 3.1% and SN1 with 4.2%. Two districts have somewhat larger proportions of LEP students, SN3 with 8.2% and SN5 with 9.3%. One district, SN2 has a substantially larger proportion of LEP students, 24.1%.

The proportion of LEP students in the foundation and transition aid districts ranges from 0% in FT5 to 3.2% in FT3. Only SN4 with 3.1% LEP students among the special needs districts falls within this range.

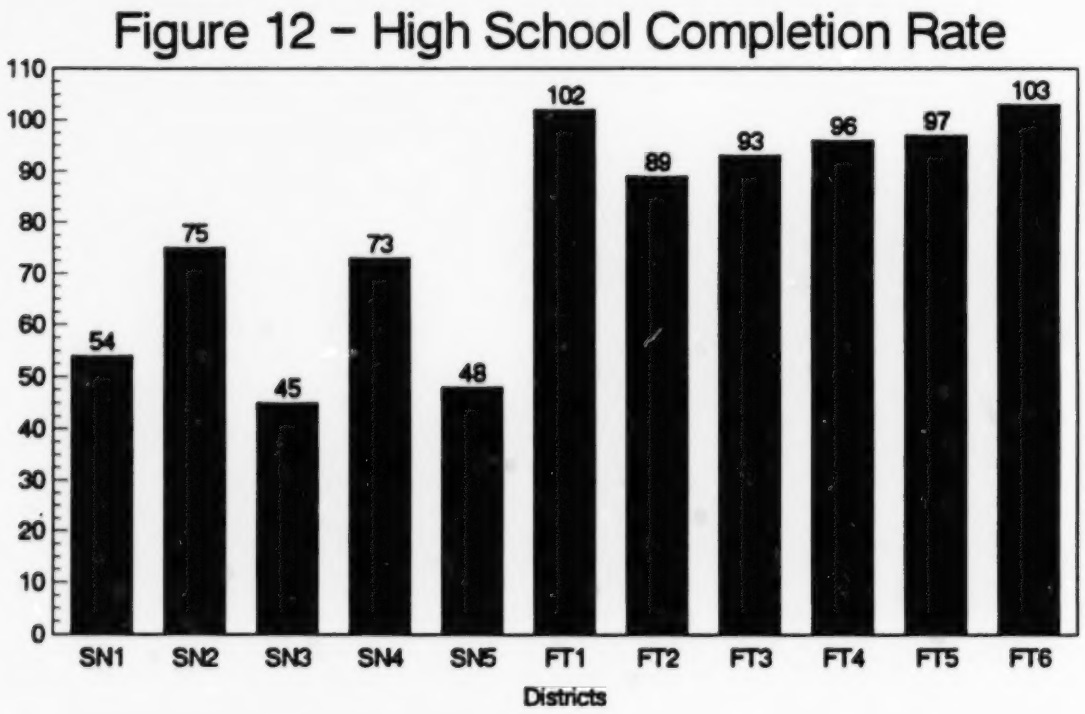
Figure 11 depicts the percentage of students enrolled in special education in the eleven districts.



Among the special needs districts, four of the districts have between 8.8% and 11.9% of their student bodies enrolled in special education; SN1 has only 3.2% of students in special education.

The proportion of special education students in the foundation and transition aid districts ranges from .01% in FT6 to 4.7% in FT4. Of the special needs districts, only SN1 with 3.2% special education students, falls within this range.

Figure 12 shows the high school completion rates in the eleven districts.



These rates provide a rough indication of the dropout rates in the eleven districts. The high school completion rates for these five special needs districts show substantial variation.

Three districts, SN1, SN3 and SN5 have rates between 45% and 54%. Two districts, SN2 and SN4 have graduation rates between 73% and 75%.

The high school completion rate for the six foundation and transition aid districts ranges from 89% in FT2 to 103%[4] in FT6. The highest completion rate among the special need districts is 75% in SN2, substantially below the lowest foundation and transition aid district.

As with the community data, it is useful to consider the set of indicators as constituting a profile for each of the five special needs districts. SN1, the special needs district with the largest proportion of Black students, has the smallest proportion of students in the free and reduced lunch program, the smallest proportion of LEP students, the smallest proportion of students in special education, and a high school completion rate, which although higher than two districts and lower than two others, is closer to the bottom of the range than to the top.

SN2, the district with the largest proportion of Hispanic students, has the second highest proportion of students in the free and reduced lunch program, by far the highest proportion of LEP students, the fourth highest proportion of students in special education, and the highest graduation rate.

SN3, the district with nearly 60% Black students and over 35% Hispanic students, has the highest proportion of students in the free and reduced lunch program, and the lowest graduation rate.

SN4, the district with the largest proportion of non-minority students (29.2%), has the second smallest proportion of Hispanic students, the smallest proportion of LEP students, the largest proportion of students in special education, and the second highest graduation rate.

SN5, a district with 42.9% Black students and 35.6% Hispanic students, has the second highest proportion of LEP students, the second highest proportion of students in special education, and the second lowest graduation rate among the five special needs districts.

An Illustration of the Impact of Community, Family, and Student Characteristics in Classrooms

The impact of the family and community conditions and the characteristics of the student populations are demonstrated most clearly by considering how they might be manifest in a typical classroom. Table 2 presents data on the incidence of these indicators for classrooms of 25 students in SN3 and FT6.

Table 2
The Incidence of Disadvantaging Characteristics in Typical Classes of 25 Students in SN3 and FT6

	Classroom in SN3		Classroom in FT6	
	%	#	%	#
Family and Community Indicators				
Families with Children Under 18 Below the Poverty Level	47.8%	12	1.3%	0
Single Parent Households	66.9%	17	3.9%	1
Adults With Less than High School Education	49.8%	12	7.5%	2
Limited English Proficient	34.7%	9	17%	4
Living with No Parents in the Labor Force	39.4%	10	1.4%	0
Student Characteristics				
Participating in Free and Reduced Lunch Program	77.9%	19	2%	1
Minority	96.2%	24	16	4
Limited English Proficient	8.2%	2	2.6%	1
Special Education	9.1%	2	.01	0
High School Completion	45%	11	103%	25

In terms of the family and community indicators, the classroom in SN3 would have 12 students from families below the poverty level, 17 students from single parent families, 12 students in families where the adults had less than a high school education, 9 students in families in which a language other than English is spoken, and 10 students living with adults who do not participate in the labor force. The classroom in FT6 would have no students in families below the poverty level, 1 student from a single parent family, 2 students living with adults with less than a high school education, 4 students in families in which a language other than English is spoken, and no students living with adults who do not participate in the labor force.[5]

The data on student characteristics show similar dramatic differences. In the SN3 classroom 19 students would be participating in the free and reduced lunch program, 24 would be racial or ethnic minorities, 2 would be limited English proficient, 2 would be in special education, and only 11 would be likely to graduate from high school. In contrast, in FT6 1 student would be participating in the free and reduced lunch program, 4 would be racial and ethnic minorities, 1 would be limited English proficient, none would be in special education, and all 25 would be likely to complete high school.

The dramatic differences in this illustration make clear that educators in different types of districts are confronting fundamentally different sets of student needs. These divergent needs are likely to lead to different ways of identifying and responding to students at risk of educational failure.

Understanding Student Needs: Defining Students At-Risk of Educational Failure

The definition and identification of students as being socially or educationally disadvantaged or at-risk of not completing school are social processes. As such they are subject to variation and change over time in response to changing attitudes and evolving agreements among relevant members of the educational community and the public at large. As noted earlier, definitions of at-risk students have focused on cultural deprivation, educational deprivation, differential susceptibility to environmental difficulties, and youth status (Natriello, McDill & Pallas, 1990, Chapter 2).

As part of our inquiry into the impact of the Quality Education Act on educational services for at-risk students, we asked district-based and school-based educators in the case study districts about the definitions of at-risk students used in the districts. Tables 3 presents the definitions of at-risk status as defined by staff members in the eleven case study districts.

Five broad types of definitions of at-risk students emerged in the responses to these interview questions. Four of these pertain to issues of academic performance; a fifth is related to issues of behavior. In Tables 3 issues related to academic performance are presented in one column, those related to behavior or other issues are listed in a second column.

A straightforward definition of at-risk status was applied to any student who fell below the state-mandated test score threshold and so was required to receive remedial services. As Table 3 indicates, SN1 is an example of a district in which state mandated levels of student performance on standardized tests are used to determine at-risk status.

A second definition of at-risk students was also based on the state-mandated test score threshold. This time, however, respondents used the threshold as a reference point only, and

indicated that students were considered at-risk for school failure in their district if they were within a certain number of points above that state-mandated threshold. Respondents reported that the local district budget supported special services for those students above the state threshold but within the district established range. Districts following this practice include SN2, SN4, FT3, and FT4.

A third definition of at-risk students was one based on any academic failure experienced by students. Such failures might involve a single failing grade for a single term or even a decline in performance within a single term. Staff describing this approach to defining students as being at-risk noted that they and their district should be able to respond to any signs of student academic problems. SN4 is an example of a district where this definition was mentioned in staff interviews.

The fourth definition of at-risk students was based on the relative performance of students. Staff members in districts with high performing student populations expressed concern that students who would be considered successful in other districts might be at-risk in a context of high performance standards and substantial pressure to excel academically. FT4 and FT5 are examples of districts in which these relative pressures might place students at-risk.

These four academic types of definitions of at-risk students appear to be closely related to the district context. Districts confronted with larger numbers of students with academic deficiencies tend to apply the state mandated definition, apparently to minimize the number of students identified.

The final type of definition of at-risk students is related to problems with student behavior. Such problems would include acting out in school, violent or abusive behavior, the

use of drugs, family instability, etc. Such problems were often reported in SN1, SN2, SN3 and SN5. Respondents viewed such problems as interfering with the ability of students to complete their high school programs successfully.

Table 3 - Definitions of At-Risk Status in the Eleven Case Study Districts

District	Academic or Test-Based Definitions	Other Definitions
SN1	State mandated levels on Early Warning Test and High School Proficiency Test	Open, students affected by drugs, violence, abuse, family instability
SN2	LAB and MAC for ESL. Minimum MPL Plus 5% for reading and math. Minimum MPL for writing in grades 4-8. District standards for grades K-3.	Open, students affected by drugs, violence, abuse, family instability -- "the increasing numbers of students who enter the system with no education, even in their own language"
SN3	In Pre-K, below 52 on district developed tests. In kindergarten and first grade below 85. In grades 2-7 below 50% on standardized reading and writing tests, and below 60% on math CTBS. In grade 8 below passing on EWT. In grades 9-12 below passing on HSPT.	Open, students affected by drugs, violence, abuse, family instability -- "My own definition- any student deprived of educational experience and an environment that permits the student to function at the appropriate chronological age."
SN4	K-8: Min. Proficiency Test Level 9-12: Min. Prof. Test Level Plus 5 "Any child is who in danger of failure."	Broad range from federal funding level to any failing child.
SN5	Pre-K below 50 scores on Brigance Test. State MLP levels used for grades 3-8. EWT and HSPT also used for higher grades	Open, students affected by drugs, violence, abuse, family instability. "Every child is at-risk because of drugs, distintegrating families, etc."

Table 3 - (continued)

District	Academic or Test-Based Definitions	Other Definitions
FT1	State mandated levels.	Policy to over-identify to get a head start on potential problems "Students who fit the profile of potential dropouts."
FT2	Mandated test scores, but used minimally.	Open, very qualitative orientation "Any student we are aware of who may not complete an education or who may be involved in negative social issues." "Any good kid potential kid problems. Someone with depression because of divorce who is considering suicide is as at risk as handicapped kids with good families who can't process information."
FT3	CAT, EWT, HSPT In grade K-7 MPL. In grades 8-12 MPL plus 5.	Open, no single definition "Those having a difficult time mastering the skills needed in society."
FT4	Students above mandated test score cut-offs are considered to be at-risk at times "We use the 55th percentile as our basic cut off. We consider these kids to be relatively at risk. We try to close the gap."	Open, any student can take advantage of special programs

Table 3 - (continued)

District	Academic or Test-Based Definitions	Other Definitions
FT5	State mandated levels are not used because very few would qualify.	Students with trouble coping with pressures, students who are new to the district. Suicidal students. "Those who do not fit the academic track norms."
FT6	Mandated CAT scores.	Students with behavior problems "Those whose self-esteem is low and affects learning." "Children from disadvantaged, dysfunctional families and those with emotional problems." "Many students appear to be more severely at risk than they really are because so much of the population is so bright."

Estimates of At-Risk

Staff members from the eleven districts were asked to provide estimates of the proportion of students in their district who are at-risk of educational failure. Table 4 presents the low estimates and high estimates reported by staff in each of the districts.

Table 4 - Estimates of the Size of the At-Risk Student Population in Interviews with Professional Staff

District	Low Estimate	High Estimate
SN1	40%	45%
SN2	50%	70%
SN3	45%	60%
SN4	60%	80%
SN5	80%	100%
FT1	10%	30%
FT2	10%	20%
FT3	5%	10%
FT4	10%	15%
FT5	15%	20%
FT6	6%	10%

The greatest proportion of students was estimated to be at-risk in SN5 where the low estimate was 80% and the high estimate was 100%. SN4 (low: 60%; high: 80%), SN2 (low: 50%; high: 70%), SN3 (low: 45%; high: 60%, and SN1 (low: 40%; high: 45%) followed in that order.

In the foundation and transition aid districts both the low and high estimates of the proportion of students who are at-risk are substantially lower than in the special needs districts. Moreover, there is much greater overlap among the estimates since they tend to cluster near the bottom of the range. The highest proportion of students identified as being at-risk was the high estimate of 30% noted by a staff member in FT1. High estimates of 20% were made by staff in FT2 and FT5, followed by high estimates of 15% by staff in FT4 and 10% by staff in FT3 and FT6. Low estimates ranged from 15% in FT5 to 10% in FT1, FT2, and FT4, to 6% in FT6 and 5% in FT3.

The average midpoint in the ranges of estimates of the size of the at-risk student population in the special needs districts is 63%; the corresponding figure for the foundation and transition aid districts is 13.4%. Thus, according to the estimates of professional staff members, the size of the at-risk population in the special needs districts is nearly five times as great as that in the foundation and transition aid districts.

Although there is no foolproof method of assessing the estimates of those interviewed in the various districts, it is possible to set the estimates in the context of the more objective family, community, and student characteristics indicators. Dividing the means on the seven family and community indicators across the five special needs districts by those for the foundation and transition aid districts and then averaging the quotients suggests that the at-risk populations in the special needs districts are about 8 times the size of those in the foundation and transition aid districts. A similar calculation using the five student characteristics indicators suggests that the at-risk populations are 9 times greater in the special needs districts than in the foundation and transition aid districts.

Although these are very crude estimates of the relative size of the at-risk populations in the types of districts, it seems reasonable to infer that differences in the staff estimates of the

at-risk populations in the two types of districts understate the magnitude of the differences in the student populations in the different types of districts. Of course, the estimates of professional staff are based on different conceptions of at-risk status, and there is considerable variation in estimates even within districts.

Programs for At-Risk Students

All eleven districts operated special discrete programs to meet the needs of students deemed to be at-risk of educational failure. These programs tended to function in conjunction with the core educational program. The number of programs for at-risk students in the special needs districts range from 11 in SN4 to 20 in SN3. Among foundation and transition aid districts the number of program is smaller, ranging from 2 in FT2 to 8 in FT3. Nevertheless, 29 of the 105 programs for at-risk students in the 11 districts are located in the foundation and transition aid districts. Of these programs, 28 were in existence prior to the 1991-92 school year; only one program was added during the year, and no programs were expanded. One program in FT2 was targeted for suspension. In contrast, 30 of the 76 programs for at-risk students in the special needs districts were begun during the 1991-92 school year, and 5 programs were expanded. In addition, two programs that had existed previously in SN4 were reinstated during 1991-92.

District-based programs are those adopted in an entire district and in operation in all schools in the district or in all schools of the relevant grade level. School-based programs are those adopted in one or more individual schools, but not as part of a district-wide adoption. Of the 76 programs for at-risk students in the special needs districts, 36 are district-based and 40 are school-based. In the foundation and transition aid districts, 19 programs are district-based, and 10 are school-based. Thus, in the special needs districts school-based programs are

the majority of the programs, while in the foundation and transition aid districts, school-based programs are outnumbered by district-based programs by nearly 2 to 1.

The programs for at-risk students were classified according to the program typology discussed earlier. Programs for at-risk students often address multiple dimensions of need and so may be classified in more than one of the four categories of the typology. However, the 105 programs were each classified according to the preponderance of their activities. Of the 105 programs, 45 were academic internal, 31 were social internal, 19 were academic external, and 10 were social external.

Table 5 presents illustrations of each of these program types drawn from the eleven districts.

Table 5 - Illustrations of Types of Programs for At-Risk Students

Academic Internal	
Attendance Officer	Spec. Ed. Programs
k-8 Family Schools	Spec. Ed. Mag. Programs
Comer Schools	EA Poe Project
Pre-K Programs	Second Chance
Computer Labs	Here's Looking at You
Bilingual/ESL Magnet Program	Cities Schools of
Bilingual/ESL Program	Excellence
HOTS	More Effective Schools
BSIP	Epic
	Bilingual Trimester
Social Internal	
Alternative High School	Extended Day Program
Saturday Programs for Families	Parent Workshops
Peer Mentoring	House System
After School Programs for Parents	Saturday Morning School
Evening Programs for Families	Rutgers Social Problem
Social Workers/Counselors	Solving
School-within-a-school	Social Problem Solving Team
Academic External	
I Have a Dream	
Field Trips	
Mechanic Certification	
After School Learning Center	
Bilingual Summer School	
BSIP Summer School	
Homework Centers	
Saturday Migrant Enrichment	
After School Tutoring	
Environmental Center	
Rites of Passage	
Social External	
High School Health Center	
Substance Abuse Counselor	
Child Advocates	
School-Based Health Clinics	
Breakfast/Lunch Program	
After School Intramurals	
Community Mentoring Program	

Efforts such as the addition of pre-kindergarten or computer labs are designed to respond to the academic needs internal to the school program. Programs such as an alternative high school that organizes instruction for a small group of students and a team of teachers are meant to strengthen the social or emotional connections between students and the school staff. Programs such as field trips to expose students to opportunities outside the local neighborhood are organized to demonstrate the utility of academic work to student future endeavors. Programs such as a high school health center and substance abuse counseling are offered to help students deal with the social disadvantages in the external environment.

Programs for at-risk students are distributed somewhat differently across the four categories in the special needs districts and the foundation and transition districts. Both special needs districts and foundation and transition aid districts report more programs in the academic internal category than in any of the other three categories. The 32 programs in this category in the special needs districts constitute 42.1% of the 76 programs for at-risk youngsters. In the foundation and transition aid districts, the 13 programs in the academic internal category represent 44.8% of the 29 programs for at-risk students. The 25 programs in the social internal category in the special needs districts make up 32.9% of the at-risk programs, while the 6 programs in this category in the foundation and transition aid districts make up only 20.7% of the total programs. The 11 programs in the academic external category in the special needs districts represent 14.5% of the programs for at-risk students in comparison with 8 programs representing 27.6% of the total programs in the foundation and transition aid districts. Finally, the 8 programs in the social external category in the special needs districts account for 10.5% of the total at-risk programs in the special needs districts while the 2 programs in this category in the foundation and transition aid districts represent only 6.9% of the total programs. Thus, the programs classified as social, either internal or external, represent 43.4% of the programs for at-risk students in the special needs districts and 27.6% of the programs in the foundation and transition aid districts.

In the special needs districts new program efforts are distributed across the four categories, but the internal categories saw the most new programmatic activity. Of the 30 new programs in the special needs districts in 1991-92, 9 were in the academic internal category, and 13 were in the social internal category. Only three new programs fell in the academic external category and only 5 new programs fell in the social external category.

Although in both the special needs districts and in the foundation and transition aid districts, programs to address the academic needs of students in ways internal to the system were the most prevalent type of program, the special needs districts were substantially more likely than the foundation and transition aid districts to have programs that respond to the social needs of students. Moreover, over half of the new program initiatives in the special needs districts in 1991-1992 were designed to address the social needs of students. In light of the community, family, and student indicators reviewed earlier, the special needs districts appear to be responding to the substantially greater social needs of their students.

Conclusions

Our examination of the Quality Education Act and at-risk students has indicated that although there are students who may reasonably be viewed as being at-risk for educational failure in all of the districts in the study, the special needs districts that were the recipients of additional state resources under the QEA legislation are in communities in which the social and demographic conditions constitute substantially greater risks than those found in the foundation and transition aid districts. These greater risks are reflected in the data on student populations in the eleven districts and in the assessments of the size of the disadvantaged populations made by school district staff members.

Using standard demographic indicators, the at-risk populations in the special needs districts in this study are eight to nine times as large as the at-risk populations in the other districts. Indeed, the social and economic conditions in the special needs districts and communities suggest that the tasks of the schools under such circumstances are fundamentally different than the tasks of schools in the other districts. Not only is the proportion of the student population that is at-risk substantially greater but the intensity of the disadvantages affecting these students is also substantially greater.

School personnel, like other analysts of the condition of students at-risk of educational failure, adopt different definitions of at-risk status and different procedures for identifying at-risk students. These differences in definitions and procedures yield estimates of the size of the at-risk population in a district, which generally reflect estimates derived from more standard indicators, but may not fully reflect the differences in the student populations in the different types of districts. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that staff in districts equipped with greater resources in the face of relatively less severe student problems can be more sensitive to problems that might go unnoticed in districts with fewer resources and more pressing student needs. Staff in districts with greater resources in the present analysis were also more likely to adopt more inclusive definitions of at-risk status, with a few even suggesting the most inclusive definition of the entire youth population being at-risk to some extent. The differential sensitivity of staff to at-risk youth as a function of student needs and available resources is worthy of further investigation as we attempt to understand how schools respond to the needs of students at-risk of educational failure.

The great disparities in the family and community conditions in which students in these different types of districts are living carry important implications for the programs developed by school districts to respond to student needs. Programmatic responses to the needs of at-risk youth were evident in all eleven districts in the study. Activity of this type was most evident

in the special needs districts, and new program initiatives during the 1991-92 school year were confined almost entirely to these districts. The foundation and transition aid districts, for the most part, simply maintained existing programs for at-risk students during the 1991-92 school year. The special needs districts used a portion of the additional resources provided by the Quality Education Act to expand programming for at-risk students.

The pattern of programs differed to some extent in the different types of districts. Both in the special needs districts and in the foundation and transition aid districts, the most prevalent type of programs for at-risk students were those designed to meet the academic internal needs of students. It is important to note that despite the extremely severe social disadvantages that characterized students in the special needs districts, these districts developed the greatest number of their special program offerings in the academic internal category. However, among the special needs districts the second most popular type of programming responded to social needs internal to the school, while among the foundation and transition aid districts, the second most popular type of programming responded to academic needs external to the school. Moreover, the special needs districts developed the largest number of new programs in response to the social internal needs of students. In view of the already substantial investment of special needs districts in academic programs for at-risk students, the concentration of new investment to meet the social internal needs of students appears both appropriate and necessary to enhance the prospects of their students for educational success.

All districts, special needs, foundation, and transition, offered few programs to address the social external needs of students. As the review of the demographic data on communities and students indicates, the scarcity of programs to meet such needs is not likely to be a problem for students in the foundation aid and transition aid districts. In those communities the external social needs of students are confined to a small proportion of the student body. However, the substantially larger proportions of students with external social needs in the

special needs districts means that the scarcity of programs to address such needs is likely to result in large numbers of students who may be ill-prepared to profit from the academic program of the school or who must contend with constant interruptions in their academic progress as family and community circumstances impinge upon their time for school work.

It is not possible to determine completely why the special needs districts have not offered more programs to meet the social external needs of their students, or indeed, to meet the academic internal needs of their students. Special needs districts appear to offer relatively few programs to address the very substantial external needs of their students. There appear to be several reasons why this might be the case. First, special needs districts have been under pressure to improve the academic programs targetted for at-risk students. Second, they have also invested more heavily in programs to address the social needs of their students that are internal to the school and its programs. Thus the special needs districts have increased their efforts to meet the academic and social needs of at-risk youth that pertain to issues internal to the school; this has left them with limited resources to address external needs. Such targetting of student needs internal to the school is consistent with much public opinion that argues for a rather restricted mission for the school. Third, new initiatives to address the external needs of students typically entail major investments in new staff and/or new facilities even to target relatively small proportions of the student population. Such investments are difficult to justify when there are clear improvements needed in the basic academic program. Additional resources provided to the special needs districts, while substantial, have not been adequate to allow them to mount more than a few new initiatives to respond to the external needs of their students.

Overall, the additional resources made available to the special needs districts appear to have led to substantial new programmatic activity to address the needs of their at-risk students. The new activity has been directed for the most part to addressing the academic and social

needs of students that are internal to the school and its program. However, the real question that remains is whether even with the addition of the new efforts of the special needs districts, they are in a position to offer the kind and intensity of programs that will fundamentally alter the educational prospects of their severely disadvantaged populations with substantial external needs. Analyses of similar programmatic initiatives undertaken over the past twenty years (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990) suggest that the kinds of efforts initiated during 1991-92 in the special needs districts are likely to result in positive but quite modest effects on their severely disadvantaged students. In other words, the efforts to date are necessary but unlikely to be sufficient.

Footnotes

[1]These districts were designated as "special needs" districts in the legislation. Districts were included in this category if they were classified by the Department of Education as urban districts and if they fell within the two lowest socio-economic status categories based on a composite of community social and economic variables. According to this criterion, specified by the New Jersey Supreme Court in the Abbott v. Burke decision, 29 districts were classified as "special needs." The legislation specified a second criterion as including districts with 15 percent of the student body eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children and at least 1,000 such students enrolled in the district. According to this criterion, one additional district was classified as "special needs" (Goertz, 1992b).

[2]Data for Figures 1 through 7 are drawn from the 1990 Census reports for each of the communities in which the eleven districts are located. In ten of the eleven cases the school district boundaries coincide with municipal boundaries. In one case the school district includes two communities. In this case the estimates for each indicator are combined from the reports of each municipality. All data are drawn from Summary Tape File 1 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1991) or Summary Tape File 3 (U.S. Bureau of Commerce, 1992).

[3]Racial/ethnic data for communities drawn from the Census and reported in Figures 5 and 6 are arranged differently than those drawn from school enrollment reports and reported in Figure 10. The Census treats Hispanic ethnic identity as separate from racial identity; the school enrollment reports utilize a single identification system for race and ethnicity.

[4]High school completion rates are calculated by dividing the number of high school graduates in 1990 by the enrollment in the ninth grade in 1986 and so may exceed 100%. More precise estimates are not available for all case study districts.

[5]The use of data on family and community characteristics drawn from the Census to characterize students in classrooms requires the simplifying assumption that students are equally distributed across the families with the disadvantaging characteristics. In addition, the use of the indicator on the educational level of adults in the community in this way requires the assumption that the distribution of education among parents in the community does not differ from the distribution of education in the general population.

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